

ARTS

Local Art Showcased at Global Museums

The Brooklyn Museum Surveys 35 Artists

By JANE L. LEVERE OCT. 23, 2014



“The Commons” by the artist Paul Ramirez Jonas is a statue made from cork, allowing visitors to the Brooklyn Museum to use the pedestal as a community bulletin board, where they can pin messages or whatever else they wish. Credit Paul Ramirez Jonas/Koenig & Clinton Gallery

A major survey of 35 local artists this fall at the [Brooklyn Museum](#) represents a tradition not exclusive merely to this white-hot borough or even New York City: Major museums around the country exhibit local artists, to promote the artists and themselves, and also serve their communities.

Kaywin Feldman, director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts — which has regularly shown Minnesota artists since 1975 — suggested that museums feature local artists today because the venues were becoming “community gathering centers.”

“They want to attract and reflect their community,” she said. “As our world becomes more global and homogeneous, there is increasing interest in the character and quality of the local.”

Although museums were originally founded as “cabinets of curiosity for study and the advancement of knowledge and scholarship,” today “people want to have active engagement with the institution they support,” said Anne Bergeron, a management consultant to arts institutions.

Exhibiting local artists “engenders loyalty, relationship building and participation,” she added. “If people feel they are represented, have a voice, they are much more likely to be involved. They will support an organization that reaches out, reciprocates and engages them.”

Michael Spring, director of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, said the city of Miami “has aspirations to become one of the great hemispheric cities of the arts.”

“It is prestigious for museums to discover and showcase new work by local artists, and it’s a gigantic advantage to artists to move their careers forward with shows at prestigious museums,” he said. Support of local artists is not new in South Florida: Miami-Dade County’s “Art in Public Places” initiative was established in 1973, and since 1988, a regional fellowship program has awarded almost \$2 million in grants to more than 200 resident artists. Museums like the Pérez Art Museum Miami, formerly known as the Miami Art Museum, also exhibit local artists; it currently is showing a survey of the Miami-based artist Adler Guerrier.

The Brooklyn Museum’s support of local artists dates to the 1930s, when it established a “Gallery for Living Artists,” devoted to Brooklyn. Its “Working in Brooklyn” exhibition series, begun in the 1980s, culminated in 2004 with a group show, “Open House: Working in Brooklyn,” which coincided with the opening of its new entrance on Eastern Parkway. The museum’s “Raw/Cooked” exhibition series, from 2011 to 2013, offered small, solo exhibitions by up-and-coming Brooklyn artists, while major, solo exhibitions of work by well-known Brooklyn artists like Wangechi Mutu, Fred Tomaselli and Mickalene Thomas also have been on display in recent years.

The museum’s current exhibition, “Crossing Brooklyn: Art from Bushwick, Bed-Stuy and Beyond,” contains works by borough artists chosen by Eugenie Tsai, curator of contemporary art, and Rujeko Hockley, assistant curator, after visits to more than 100 studios. Artists in the exhibition are at all career levels, from emerging to established; what they have in common, Ms. Tsai said, “is that they engage with the world in different ways.”

Some of that engagement has taken place in Brooklyn and is even taking place within the museum, during the run of the exhibition. McKendree Key’s “The Den Transaction” is an installation that documents with text, photography and video a furnished, one-room cabin she built behind her Bedford-Stuyvesant brownstone, where guests stay in exchange for goods and services.

Museum visitors can use the cork pedestal of a life-size cork statue of a riderless horse, by Paul Ramírez Jonas, as a bulletin board to pin up whatever they wish. The statue, called “The Commons,” is based on the equestrian statue of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius at the Capitoline Museums in Rome. “ArtAction” by Project Eats is a three-part artwork on the museum’s grounds: vegetable gardens; a farm stand on Thursdays in front of the museum that sells Brooklyn-grown produce; and an energy hub station where visitors can pedal a bicycle to generate power for future use by Project Eats.

Exhibition artists also will curate an evening of performances, talks and other activities on Jan. 3; the show closes on Jan. 4. Ms. Tsai said the exhibition “dovetails nicely with the museum’s institutional commitment” of connecting with “the surrounding community and reaching beyond its walls.”

Referring to other exhibitions of local artists’ work recently on display elsewhere in Brooklyn — including the first BRIC Biennial and a project organized by the Weeksville Heritage Center and Creative Time — Ms. Hockley said that although “Brooklyn has been a creative center for a long time, there is a synergy this fall that’s really exciting.”

Nor are local artists ignored by institutions in other New York boroughs. The Museum of Arts and Design in Manhattan earlier this year had an exhibition showcasing the work of 100 “NYC makers,” including creators of set design, stained glass and hats.

Since 2002, the Queens Museum has offered every other year the “Queens International,” an exhibition that a spokesman said was designed to “take the creative pulse and capture the energy” of the borough’s multiethnic arts community; the last six exhibitions have shown over 300 local artists. In addition, the Andrew Freedman Home, a cultural center and artist colony in the Bronx, recently displayed photographs of 80 Bronx artists at work taken by 30 Bronx photographers.